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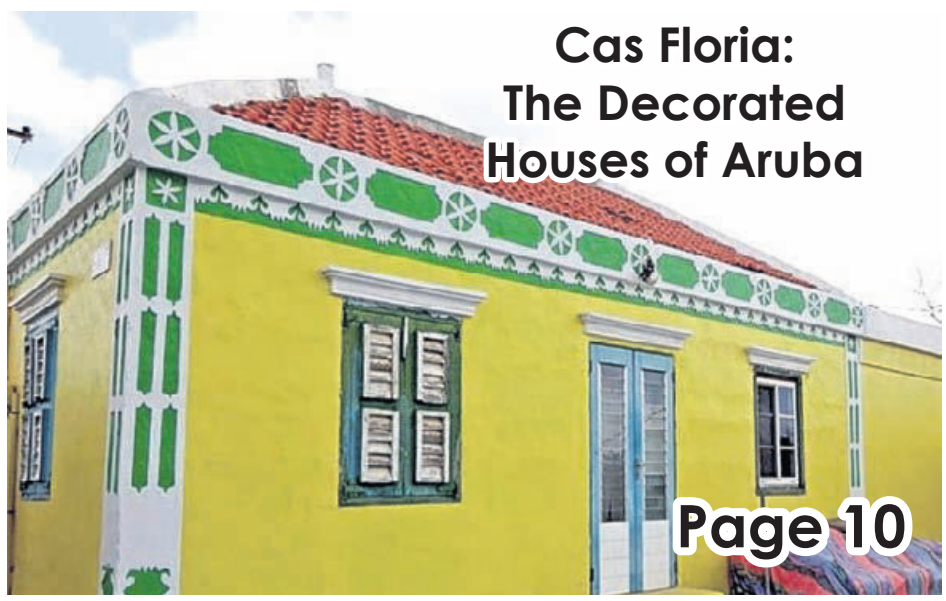

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT 7 DAYS A WEEK
PROFESSIONAL COMPLIMENTARY PICTURES ON TUESDAY AND FRIDAY

SUNDAY:	MONDAY:	TUESDAY:	WEDNESDAY:	THURSDAY:	FRIDAY:	SATURDAY:
MARRYBELL MADURO	ANDERSON BAHAMON	JEAN PAUL	MAILLEYN ALVARADO	MARRYBELL MADURO	MAILLEYN ALVARADO	RICKY THOMAS
SINGER	SINGER	SAXOPHONIST	VIOLINIST	SINGER	VIOLINIST	GUITAR
6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.	6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.	6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.	6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.	6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.	7:00 TO 9:00 P.M.	6:30 TO 8:30 P.M.

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Trump says will raise U.S. tariffs on EU cars to 25%

Washington, United States
President Donald Trump said Friday that he will hike U.S. tariffs on cars and trucks from the European Union next week, charging that the bloc is not complying with an earlier trade deal.
The pact, which was struck last summer, had capped the US tariff on EU autos and parts at 15 percent, which is lower than the 25-percent duty that Trump imposed on many other trading partners.
These sector-specific duties were not affected by a Supreme Court ruling earlier in the year that struck down a swath of Trump's global levies. But the U.S. leader said Friday: "Based on the fact the European Union is not complying with our fully agreed to Trade Deal, next week I will be increasing Tariffs charged to the European Union for Cars and Trucks coming into the United States."
"The Tariff will be increased to 25%," he wrote on his Truth Social platform.

A Mercedes car without whees is seen in a car park of a car dealer in Dortmund, western Germany, on July 30, 2025.

He told a Florida event later Friday that Washington had informed Germany of his threat because "they and other European nations have not adhered to our trade deal."
He accused German automakers like Mercedes-Benz and BMW of ripping off Americans.
Trump's announcement came a day after his renewed criticism of German Chancellor Friedrich Merz. Trump told Merz to focus on ending the Ukraine war instead of "interfering" on Iran. Germany would likely be hit hard by a sharp vehicle tariff, as it is responsible for a significant amount of EU auto exports.
Reacting to the announcement, a European Commission spokesperson told AFP: "Should the US take measures inconsistent with the joint statement, we will keep our options open to protect EU interests."
The spokesperson added that the bloc is implementing its commitments "in line with standard legislative practice" and keeping the Trump administration updated during this process.
Last July, the EU had laid the groundwork for possible retaliation if talks with Washington fell through -- preparing a list of U.S. goods that could be targeted.

- 'Light a fire' -

"President Trump has clearly lost patience with EU efforts to implement its commitments under the bilateral trade deal concluded months ago," former US trade official Wendy Cutler told AFP.
She said Trump appeared to be "hoping to light a fire under Brussels to accelerate its domestic procedures."
His threats to the EU are reminiscent of a similar move against South Korea months ago, added Cutler, who is now senior vice president at the Asia Society Policy Institute. In late March, EU lawmakers gave their green light to the bloc's tariff deal with Trump, but with conditions.
A large majority of EU lawmakers agreed to cut EU tariffs on some U.S. imports, as a first step towards implementing the 2025 deal, but they also sought additional safeguards.
Although the European Parliament has given its conditional approval to the EU-U.S. trade pact, before the deal is implemented by the bloc, it still needs to be negotiated with EU states.
The new threat on European cars "explain why many small businesses expect to be cautious" with Trump's tariffs, said Dan Anthony, who heads "We Pay the Tariffs," a coalition of nearly 1,200 small businesses.
"You never know what might trigger the next tariff threat," Anthony added in a statement.
In April, EU trade chief Maros Sefcovic was in Washington to meet with counterparts including US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and trade envoy Jamieson Greer.
At the time, he said the EU was also seeking more progress in easing the effects of still-steep US steel tariffs, adding that talks were going in a positive direction.
The United States is the second largest market for new EU vehicle exports, after the United Kingdom, according to a 2025 fact sheet by the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association.
Over a fifth of EU vehicle exports went to the United States.
Germany alone exported some 450,000 vehicles to the United States in 2024, according to the VDA industry group. But that figure has since slipped.❑

(Wear a bulletproof vest? I don't want to look fat, says Trump

U.S. President Donald Trump holds an event to sign an executive order in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, DC on April 30, 2026.

Washington, United States U.S. President Donald Trump said Thursday he wasn't keen on wearing a bulletproof vest despite multiple alleged assassination attempts -- as he is worried it may make him look fat.
"I don't know if I can handle looking 20 pounds heavier," Trump told reporters when asked if there were discussions about him wearing a protective vest.
Reports in U.S. media said it was under consideration following the latest alleged attempt to kill the 79-year-old president at a Washington gala on Saturday.
"I've been asked about that. I guess it's something you consider. In one way, you don't like to do it because you're giving in to a bad element. And so, I don't know. But I have been asked about it."

A man has been charged with trying to assassinate the Republican on Saturday night at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner at the Washington Hilton hotel. Secret Service agents tackled the alleged assailant before he was able to reach the ballroom where the gala was taking place.
It was the third alleged attempt on Trump's life in the space of two years.
The most serious was when the president was wounded in the ear by a gunman at an election rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, in 2024. One audience member was killed.
Former reality TV star Trump is notoriously sensitive about his appearance.
His weight has been a concern, although he is slimmer in his second term as president.

A self-confessed fast food fan, Trump weighed 224 pounds (101.6 kilograms) as of his last full annual medical in April 2025, down from 243 pounds in 2019.❑

Pentagon signs classified AI deals with tech giants, snubs Anthropic

Washington, United States

The Pentagon on Friday announced agreements with seven leading artificial intelligence companies to deploy their technology on classified military networks, a move that pointedly excludes Anthropic amid its ongoing dispute with the Defense Department.

SpaceX, OpenAI, Google, Nvidia, Reflection, Microsoft and Amazon Web Services will be integrated into the Defense Department's most sensitive classified systems, used for mission planning, weapons targeting and other purposes, according to a statement.

The statement did not mention Anthropic, which is caught up in a fight with the Pentagon over guardrails governing how the military could use its AI tools.

The U.S. military currently uses Anthropic's AI but is weaning itself from it after the company objected to its technology being used for mass domestic surveillance or to directly control lethal autonomous weapons.

The Pentagon subsequently labeled the AI startup a supply-chain risk earlier this year, barring its use by the U.S. military and its contractors.

In February, Trump instructed the government to "immediately cease" using Anthropic's technology

This combination of pictures created on March 02, 2026 shows Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei looks on during a meeting with France's President Emmanuel Macron on the sidelines of the AI Impact Summit in New Delhi on February 19, 2026.

-- a designation typically reserved for organizations from unfriendly foreign countries.

"What we've learned...is that it's irresponsible to be reliant on any one partner," Emil Michael, the Pentagon's de facto chief technology officer, told CNBC.

Michael added that the deals included a mix of closed and open-source models, with a source familiar with the matter telling AFP that the latter would be provided by Nvidia and AI firm Reflection.

Open-source models, which can be run without ongoing licensing fees or vendor access, offer the Pentagon greater operational flexibility and reduce dependence on any single commercial provider.

Anthropic's AI model, Claude, -- which is not open source -- had been the only one authorized for use in classified military operations and remains in use.

The company is now fighting the Pentagon punitive measures in court.

- 'Augment decision-making' -

Tensions had shown signs of easing ahead of Friday's announcement. Trump said last week he thought the administration would get along with Anthropic "just fine," after CEO Dario Amodei visited the White House for talks that a spokesperson described as "productive and constructive."

Friday's announcement framed the deals with Anthropic's rivals as central to the Trump administration's push to build what it called an "AI-first fighting force."

The integrations would "streamline data synthesis, elevate situational understanding, and augment warfighter decision-making," it said.

The Pentagon said its GenAI.mil platform -- described as its official AI system -- had already been used by more than 1.3 million department personnel, generating tens of millions of prompts and deploying hundreds of thousands of agents in five months.

More than 600 Google employees demanded Monday that the company reject the Pentagon deal.

In 2018, an employee movement successfully pushed Google to abandon Project Maven, a Pentagon program to integrate AI into drone operations.

In recent years the company has embarked on a strategy shift, steadily rebuilding its military business and competing with rivals for defense contracts.

Project Maven is now led by AI firm Palantir and has since evolved into an AI-assisted targeting and battlefield management system that has vastly accelerated the kill chain -- the process from initial detection to destruction.❑

Anti-Bezos campaign urges Met Gala boycott in New York

New York, United States

A poster campaign opposing Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's involvement in the upcoming Met Gala cropped up across New York's streets and subways Wednesday, calling for a boycott of the star-studded event.

Bezos and his wife Lauren Sanchez Bezos are lead sponsors and honorary co-chairs of the high-profile fundraising event, to be held May 4, which draws A-listers across entertainment, sport, fashion and business.

But the billionaire couple's stake in the gala has angered activists, who primarily oppose Bezos's business practices.

One poster depicts a bottle filled with urine on a red carpet -- a reference to some Amazon drivers having to urinate in bottles due to a lack of bathroom breaks.

Another portrays Bezos in a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) uniform, as Amazon's cloud computing subsidiary has a contract with the divisive agency leading President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown.

Behind the campaign is a group founded in Britain called "Everyone Hates Elon" -- which, a spokesperson stressed, "also targets other billionaires" beyond Elon Musk, the world's richest person.

"I think it feels really powerful to take action," said the spokesperson, who asked for anonymity due to fears of retaliation.

"I think it's speaking to a need that people have to stand up to some of these people that are controlling our lives."

The group says it has received more than 14,000 pounds ($19,000) to fund its campaign in New York -- mainly from small donations averaging 10 pounds.

A "Boycott The Bezos Met Gala" poster hangs on a bus stop in the Manhattan borough of New York City on April 27, 2026.

The Met Gala is often criticized for its displays of immense wealth and has previously drawn protests over economic inequality, environmental concerns, and the war in Gaza.❑

Crazy flights: Kiss frontman produces plane disaster movie

Los Angeles, United States

For those who fear flying, the thriller "Deep Water" reveals a new nightmare: surviving an emergency landing, only to find yourself surrounded by man-eating sharks.

Starring Oscar-winner Sir Ben Kingsley ("Gandhi") and Aaron Eckhart ("Batman: The Dark Knight"), the disaster flick premieres in the US on Thursday and was produced by "Kiss" singer Gene Simmons.

The film blends action with horror -- two genres well known to its director.

Finnish filmmaker Renny Harlin, who has previously helmed hits like "Die Hard 2," "Cliffhanger," and "A Nightmare on Elm Street 4," said "Deep Water" is actually a human drama.

"If you took away the plane crash and you took away the sharks...it's all about those people put in an extraordinary situation and seeing who they really are," he told AFP.

Gene Simmons attends a basketball game between the Los Angeles Clippers and Charlotte Hornets at Intuit Dome on January 12, 2026 in Inglewood, California.

The survival thriller marks another aquatic plunge for the 67-year-old director, who was also behind "Deep Blue Sea" (1999), starring Samuel L. Jackson.

This time, his characters plunge into a new nightmare when the plane taking them from Los Angeles to Shanghai makes an emergency landing in the middle of the ocean, leaving them at the mercy of a school of hungry mako sharks.

The director, who has worked with screen tough guys like Bruce Willis and Sylvester Stallone said flying, however commonplace, remains "unnatural" and can be terrifying for many people.

"When you put characters in a situation that feels dangerous to begin with, and then you take them through something extreme, which is a plane crash...ending up in the water and being surrounded by sharks, then obviously, you have a situation that is scary," he said. "It's one of those things where you really put yourself into that situation, and imagine what you would do."

The director's involvement attracted Gene Simmons, the make-up wearing bassist and vocalist of "Kiss," to produce the film.

Simmons said he feels constantly drawn to the creative process that makes the magic of cinema possible.

But the film brought back some less-than-scary memories for the musician, a frequent traveler who toured the world with the "I Was Made For Lovin' You" outfit.

The musician recounted how on one overnight flight to Tokyo, he had got up from his seat to use the facilities, but seemingly forgot to lock the door.

An off-duty flight attendant "had to go too, but she maybe accidentally opened my restroom," the veteran rocker said.❑

AI actors and writers not eligible for Oscars: Academy

Los Angeles, United States

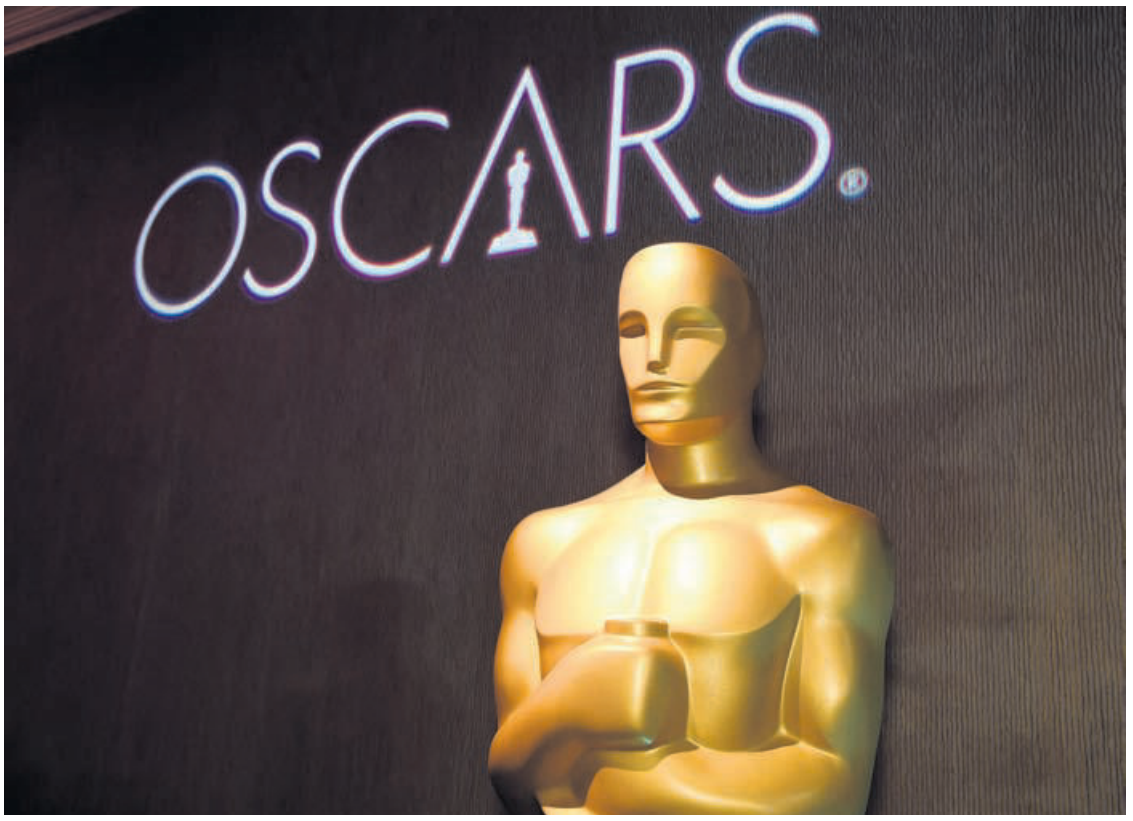
Actors created with artificial intelligence will not be eligible for an Oscar, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences said Friday as it launched a crackdown on the use of AI.

New rules include a requirement that only real, live human performers -- not their AI avatars -- are eligible for the film world's biggest prizes, and screenplays must have been penned by a person, rather than a chatbot.

"In the Acting category, only roles credited in the film's legal billing and demonstrably performed by humans with their consent will be considered eligible," the Academy said.

"In the Writing categories, the rules codify that screenplays must be human-authored to be eligible."

The ruling comes days after an AI version of the late Val Kilmer was unveiled to an audience of cinema owners, a year after the "Top Gun" star's death.



Oscar statue watches over the 91st Oscars Nominees Luncheon at the Beverly Hilton hotel on February 4, 2019 in Beverly Hills.

A youthful, digital version of Kilmer appeared in the trailer for archeological action pic "As Deep as the Grave," telling another character: "Don't fear the dead and don't fear me."

The project was created with the enthusiastic support of the actor's family, who granted access to Kilmer's video archives, which were used to recreate the actor at multiple stages of his life.

The use of artificial intelligence remains one of the most sensitive issues in the entertainment industry and was central to the 2023 strikes that shut down Hollywood, as actors and writers warned that unchecked technology threatened their livelihoods.

Other updates to the Academy's rules include a change in the way that films can be nominated for best international feature.

Until this year, only a film selected by an official national grouping could be entered -- a problem for any critical movie made in an authoritarian state.

For example, Iranian director Jafar Panahi's "It Was Just an Accident" was nominated earlier this year as a submission from France.

Under the new rules, a non-English language film also can be submitted in the category if it wins a qualifying award at a major international film festival, including Cannes, Berlin, Busan, Venice or Toronto.

In that same category, the film will be deemed the nominee and not the country, and its director will be "listed on the statuette plaque after the film title" along with the country if applicable, the Academy announced.❑

Sudanese schoolchildren race to make up for years lost to war

Port Sudan, Sudan

Sudanese 13-year-old Afrah wants to become a surgeon, and nothing will stop her, not even the war that has ravaged her country and forced millions of children out of school.

Quiet and determined, she kept learning on her own for months, uprooted by the now three-year conflict between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

"I would study my lessons again and again," she told AFP at a displacement camp in Port Sudan, where she is again receiving an education thanks to UNICEF and local organisation SCEFA.

Afrah is one of more than 25 million minors in Sudan, or half the total population, of whom eight million are currently out of school, according to the UN children's agency.

At the Al-Hishan camp, tents arranged in a square function as an elementary school for more than 1,000 children -- nearly a third of whom required an accelerated curriculum to make up for lost time.

Laughter fills the camp now, but most of the children arrived traumatised by horrors including starvation and rocket fire.

Their drawings, educators said, were at first dominated by war: depictions of the tanks, weapons and death they saw as their families fled.

"They come here scared, exhausted, isolated, but over time you see their drawings change," UNICEF spokesperson Mira Nasser told AFP.

"They start to adapt and process."

In one tent, children repeated hand-washing instructions after a social worker, while in another, they recited a poem in choral unison.

Elsewhere, a teacher -- herself displaced and living at the camp -- explained chemical and physical reactions to her class, as her three-year-old son pulled at her skirt.

"These children's future is at stake, and education is itself a form of protection," Nasser said.

"Here they can at least get a sense of normalcy, even in a displacement site. They can resume their education, they can play, they can make friends."

Displaced Sudanese students attend a class at an elementary school run by the Sudanese Coalition for Education in partnership with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), south of Port Sudan, on April 26, 2026.

- DIY operation -

Awatef al-Ghaly, a 48-year-old Arabic teacher who was displaced from North Darfur, remembered her first days at the site, when thousands of families were left listless with their kids in tow.

"There were 60 teachers here. We just got to work," she told AFP, at the same empty plot where they started, in the shadow of the Red Sea mountains.

They lined the students up by grade, threw together a schedule and started going through old lessons.

Soad Awadallah, 52, taught English for four decades in South Darfur before arriving in Port Sudan.

"It took a lot of patience, we had the kids all sat on the ground at first," she said, gesturing towards the rows of desks that now fill the tents, a welcome addition even if students have to squeeze in four to a bench.

According to Nasser, because of the time that students lost, ranging from months to years, "some even forgot how to read and write".

But their determination was indomitable, and the makeshift school recently graduated its first class from elementary to middle school, Ghaly said with pride.

"Even when things were difficult, in the heat of summer with bugs everywhere, the kids wanted to learn," she said.

Before the final exam, "some of them would follow us teachers home begging for more review sessions".

- 'Want to help people' -

Fatma, 16, wants to become a psychiatrist to help those hurt by the fighting in Sudan.

"This war has destroyed people emotionally... My father was in the main market in Khartoum when the RSF went through killing people. He ran away, and he still feels that pain," she told AFP.

"When I sit with the social worker, I feel better. I want to help people like that."

One little girl, who came up to an AFP journalist's hip, was missing her right arm, amputated after she was wounded in the capital Khartoum.

She high-fived with her left hand.

Across Sudan, five million children are internally displaced, according to UNICEF. Millions are going hungry, including over 825,000 children under five suffering severe acute malnutrition.

The use of child soldiers has been reported across the country, and rampant sexual violence against minors has prevented many from returning to school even in areas now safe from the fighting.

Many just want to go home. "I miss my friends and my family, I miss my school in Khartoum -- it was full of trees," 14-year-old Ibrahim said.

But he has a goal. "I want to become a petroleum engineer," he told AFP, as the sound of children playing outside filled the tent.

During recess, dozens of pupils dashed around their teachers, laughing, playing and making hearts at AFP's cameras.

One boy named Rizeq, clad in a red Manchester United jersey, steeled himself and walked up to the adults.

His voice a little shaky but his chest puffed out, he said: "I want more English classes in the evening."❑

India's cows offer biogas alternative to Mideast energy crunch

Bulandshahr, India

Across much of India, an energy crunch caused by the Iran war has prompted long queues for cooking gas cylinders. That's not a problem for Gauri Devi.

On a stove with blue flames, she flips a chapati flatbread, burning biogas produced from cow dung -- an alternative fuel helping ease pressure on supplies.

"It cooks everything," the 25-year-old said in her courtyard kitchen in Nekpur, a village in Uttar Pradesh, about 90 kilometers (55 miles) from New Delhi. "If the pressure goes down, we let it rest for half an hour and it works again."

India consumes more than 30 million tons of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) annually, importing over half its needs.

This photograph taken on April 24, 2026 shows a villager collecting cow dung from her cattle stable near her residence in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr district.

The government insists there is no shortage of cooking gas, but supply delays, panic buying and black marketeers have created long queues for cylinders.

However, since the 1980s India has also promoted biogas as a low-cost rural energy source, subsidizing more than five million "digester" units that convert farm waste into methane for cooking, and nitrogen-rich slurry for fertilizer.

For Gauri, it requires mixing a couple of buckets of dung with water, then pouring the mixture into a car-sized underground tank topped with a storage balloon.

It provides a piped methane supply so regular that she only uses an LPG cylinder for emergencies or large gatherings.

The biogas works for everything -- "vegetables, tea, lentils", she said.

- 'Black gold' -

The residual slurry is later spread on fields as fertilizer. It has better nitrogen availability for plants compared with raw dung, farmers say.

"The manure is so good," said farmer Pramod Singh, who installed a larger unit in 2025, enough for six people, fuelled by 30–45 kilograms of dung daily from four cows.

And he said the slurry fertilizer is particularly valuable at a time when global supplies of artificial fertilizers have been hit by trade disruptions due to the war.

"The real benefit is not just the gas -- that is like a bonus," local farmer leader Pritam Singh said. "The slurry is 'black gold'."

More than 45 percent of India's 1.4 billion people rely on farming, and the country has one of the largest cattle populations.

India -- the world's most populous nation and third-largest fossil fuel polluter -- has pushed large-scale biogas production to achieve a goal of carbon neutrality by 2070.

The government last year required that biogas account for at least one percent of liquid gas fuelling both vehicles and for domestic use -- rising to five percent by 2028.

Dozens of multi-million dollar production plants are now in the pipeline.

But small-scale rural producers are also being rolled out -- units cost around 25,000–30,000 rupees ($265-$318), often heavily subsidized by the government.

In a Hindu-majority nation where cows are revered and dung and urine are used in everything from floor plastering and fuel to ritual practices, it is easy to win supporters, said Pritam Singh.

He installed his first plant in 2007, and has helped put in 15 more in his village in the past year alone.

He said interest had shot up after the LPG shortages.

"People who earlier were not interested now ask how to get it," he said.

"Once they see food being cooked and crops benefiting, they are convinced."

- 'Mini factories' -

But biogas is still a small fraction of household cooking fuel -- with LPG considered more convenient because companies manage the supply chain.

"Biogas plants are not just equipment; they are mini factories," said A.R. Shukla, president of the Indian Biogas Association.❑

Afghans celebrate spring in bright red poppy fields

This photograph taken on April 24, 2026 shows Afghan men taking a selfie as they stand among the common poppy flowers on a hillside in the Jalayer Valley of Northern Afghanistan's Shirin Tagab district.

Shirin Tagab, Afghanistan

In the middle of a field filled with bright red poppies, Afghans frolic among the spring flowers in a tradition deeply rooted in the country's north.

Families flocked to the valleys of Shirin Tagab district, near the border with Turkmenistan, to be among thousands of flowers that appeared after abundant rain.

"There has been a drought for almost 10 years. No flowers or greenery grew," said Ghawsudin, who only uses one name.

"This year has been very good, and God is merciful," said the 79-year-old, who drove for three hours just to see the flowers.

Mohammad Ashraf, a 35-year-old visitor, said he hadn't seen so many poppies for more than a decade.

"Now there are so many red flowers, and you see people come here for picnics," he told AFP.

The landscape in Shirin Tagab is brightened by the common poppy, not the opium poppy that authorities have banned.

- 'Vitality and freshness' -

Many Afghans living in the north used to travel to see the poppies after celebrating Persian New Year, Nowruz, in the city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

The Taliban government, which applies a strict interpretation of Islamic law, has stopped such celebrations each spring.

But the tradition of visiting the poppies, which are widely revered in poems and songs, has endured.

Oriane Zerah, a photographer who published a book about Afghans and flowers, said they are an integral part of daily life.

"As soon as an Afghan has a little space in their garden, they plant a flower. Even in displacement camps, there'll be a flower somewhere. They put them on their pakol, one of their traditional hats, and there are desserts made with flowers," she told AFP.

The poppy has also been associated with wartime in the country, with the flower often placed on the coffins of fighters, according to Afghan writer Taqi Wahidi.

The same flower is widely used in countries, such as Britain, Australia and New Zealand, where people wear artificial poppies to remember those killed in past conflicts.

Nowadays in Afghanistan, however, the poppy "symbolizes vitality and freshness", according to Wahidi.

"At the same time that nature is renewed, human beings also want to bring new colors into their lives," he said.❑

The Lionfish and its threat to our marine wild life

(Oranjestad)—Despite its colorful and striking appearance, the lionfish has become a Caribbean-wide problem for Atlantic sea life. The Aruban marine wild life is also affected by this beautiful dilemma, as it is foreign to our waters and has become a danger to our local fish and reefs.

Originating from the Indo-Pacific Ocean, the lionfish is a relatively small fish. It has no teeth, but it does protect itself against predators using its sharp, colorful spikes. It is said that the sting of a lionfish can be up to 100 times more painful than that of a bee's sting.

Its natural predators in the Indo-Pacific are sharks and barracudas, but in the Caribbean Sea, local fish do not recognize the lionfish as part of their diet. In other words, the lionfish has no predators in the Caribbean Sea. And this becomes a major problem for our local marine life; if there are no predators to stimulate population control of lionfish, these fish can continue to reproduce and expand to other parts of the Atlantic, become more invasive and dangerous for other types of fish.

For Aruba, the lionfish is a problem especially for our local coral reefs. According to Patrick van Brakel, lionfish expert and hunter from the Hunting Lionfish Aruba foundation, every reef has a "cleaning station"—tiny fish that eat algae and other types of waste on a reef, thus maintaining the reef's health and providing food to the fish population in the area. However, as the lionfish feeds off of these tiny fish, it becomes harder for the coral reef to maintain its health.

Patrick also shares the origins of lionfish in the Caribbean Sea. It is theorized that the introduction of these fish in the Atlantic happened in Florida, where people would buy lionfish from across the world to keep in their aquariums. However, lionfish grow, and as these buyers realized that the fish were too much upkeep, they were let out into the ocean to roam free. From continental USA, the lionfish travelled to and invaded the entire Caribbean area, from Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao up to New York. In Aruba, lionfish were discovered in 2009.

Controlling the lionfish population is challenge, as each female fish can lay up to 40,000 eggs a day. Luckily, we have people like van Brakel who dedicate their lives hunting and capturing these invasive species, using them for consumption and jewelry making.

They are caught with a hand spear, an object resembling a garbage picker with 4 sharp prongs. These spears are used like a sling shot to catch lionfish from a distance. These fish are then put into a collecting tube and taken out of the water. This way, he does his part in protecting the local wild life.❑

Today is going to be a good day

(Oranjestad)—Here's why: Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Yes, we know. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.

Nature Calls

The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. The guided tours are even free of charge. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In Total the park consists of 7907 acres protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whiptail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center.

For more information, visit the website www.acf.aw

The Lighthouse

No, you would not think of this as a hidden gem. The California Lighthouse is actually one of the most known highlights in Aruba and many repeated guests most probably took the ride uphill already. But, there is a significant change to this tower. Since September 2016 you can climb the top. In 2015 Stichting Monumentenfonds started the restoration of the California Lighthouse. The project finished in September 2016 and the Lighthouse is now open for visitors to enjoy the beautiful view from the top. The construction of the California Lighthouse started in 1915. The name 'California' came from a vessel of the West India Company and Pacific Steamship Co. called 'California' that shipwrecked in the area in 1891. Therefore they came up with the idea of building a lighthouse that could indicate the island's eastern tip to ships with its light.

Kayak in the Mangroves

Mangel Halto at Savaneta is definitely a place not to miss out on. The beautiful beach with the natural mangroves is simply a beauty, but if you are into a more active way to enjoy the nature: take a kayak. While you are doing some workout—as it might get a little windy and rough—you will see the island from a different perspective. You can even make a stop to do some snorkeling at the reef. It's fun, it's healthy and for sure something else.❑

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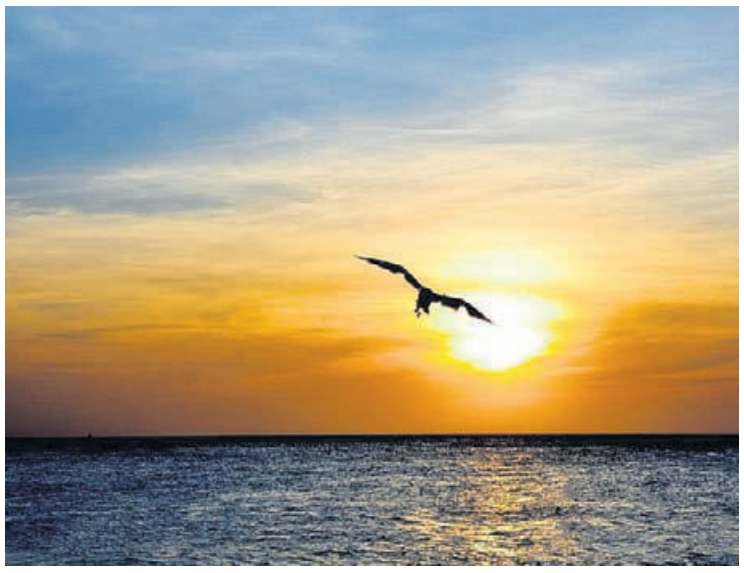


Best spots to view the sunset

(Oranjestad)—What can be more romantic than surprising your partner with a date watching the sunset? Aruba's sunset leave many speechless, and luckily, the best spots to view the sunset are entirely accessible and easy to find. Here are some of the best places to view the sunset on the island.

California Light House
Of course, being one of the highest points easily accessible to locals and tourists, the California Light House hill not only offers a tremendous view of the sunset, but also a breath taking scenery of most of the island. In the distance you can spot all the hotels, the western shoreline and the wild waves that crash on the northern side of the island.

Manchebo & Eagle Beach
Speaking of the western shoreline, the best spots for viewing the sunset on the beach has to be either Manchebo Beach or at Eagle Beach, which stretch along the entire western coast of the island. The sunset on these beaches is truly breathtaking; the sky and ocean look so big and spacious, and paired with the orange/pink hue of the sunset, the white sandy beaches and the soft sounds of waves crashing—it can only be described as an experience!

Arashi Beach
Another beach that has to be considered as another great spot to view the sunset. Arashi Beach is the last beach you will find along the western coast line, just before you drive up the hill to the California Light House. A favorite for surfers and body boarders, the Arashi sky stretches out for miles, lending a spectacular canvas for the sun to create a masterpiece of orange, pink and purple

Hooiberg Hill
These last two options are for more active couples. If you and your partner like to hike, the Hooiberg Hill may be a great place for you to get your daily workout in and enjoy a beautiful view of the sunset and the island as a little reward. Climb on top the 587-step stairs and reach the top to enjoy this incredible scenery.

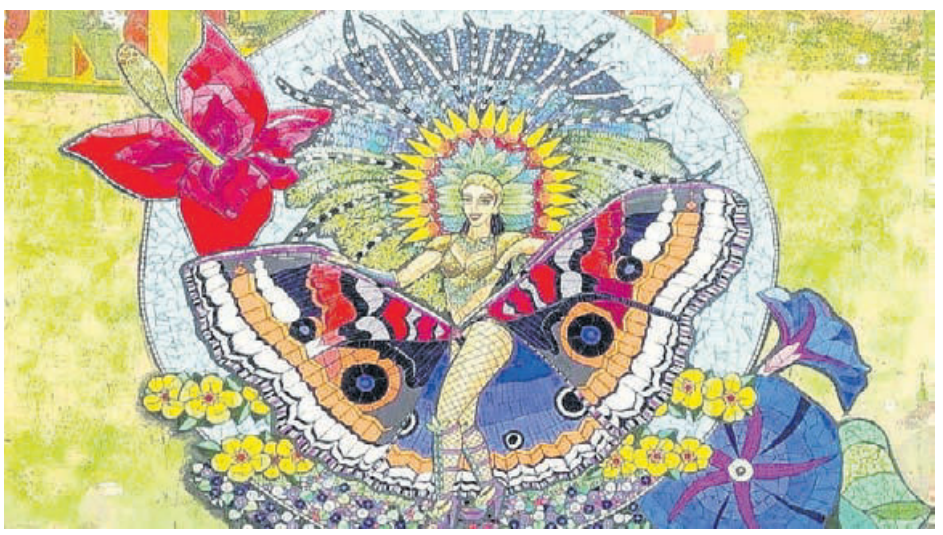
Casibari Rock Formation
If you're a rock climber, you might enjoy watching the sunset on top of the Casibari Rock Formation. It's no Yosemite, but it does offer a fun little exercise to get to the top. But if you prefer not to get your hands a little dirty, you can always use the stairs in the back.hue.❑

Exploring the Mainstreet of San Nicolas

SAN NICOLAS— At Just 11 miles southeast from Oranjestad you will enter the city San Nicolas, also known as Sunrise City or Chocolate City. A city that is rich in authentic culture and island charm. San Nicolas is Aruba's second largest city and was once a bustling company town dominated by the oil industry since the early 1930's.

Over the course of four decades, its demographics had changed immensely due to a stream of Afro-Caribbean and South American workers who came to fill the jobs in the oil refinery between the 1920's until the 1960's. To this day traces of the multicultural influences in culinary offerings and customs, housing and population are clearly visible in San Nicolas – more than anywhere else on the island.

Flow of history
If you are looking for history San Nicolas has it.



The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history which began in the 19th century. Here you will learn about gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and the tourism industries which made San Nicolas once a bustling business center. Experience the touching stories of those who were part of this history.

The Community Museum holds a remarkable collection that spans millennia. Ancient fossils stand next to tableaus of an authentically recreated colonial kitchen and bedroom and 19th-century barbershop, just to name a few of the items of old-time Aruba that has been preserved. A collection of artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance can be found here for the purpose of education or enjoyment.

The new San Nicolas
In the shadow of the refinery, an art capital is quietly beginning to grow. This is the new San Nicolas, a place that is starting to become a magnet for all that is young, cool and hip in Aruba. Indeed, San Nicolas has all of the ingredients of an emerging cultural hub — varied history, interesting architecture, and, perhaps most importantly, an urban layout that makes it walkable. As you walk around, the streets are silent but the walls are loud, filled with bright, colorful murals painted by a collection of artists from around the world. ❑

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Oranjestad marks the grand opening of Cas Veneranda!

This week, the Minister of Finance, Economic Affairs and Primary Sector, Geoffrey Wever (Futuro), together with the Prime Minister, fellow Ministers, Members of Parliament, the Arends family, Mrs. Anne Witsenburg, and the entire team of Monumenten Fonds Aruba, the Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry, and other invited guests, celebrated the opening of Cas Veneranda.

The opening of Cas Veneranda marks a major milestone in the revitalization of downtown Oranjestad. One of the goals of the AVP–Futuro Cabinet is to bring life back to Oranjestad and San Nicolas. With the relocation of government departments into historic and monumental buildings in downtown Oranjestad, the national heritage continues to be appreciated and preserved in a modern way.

Minister Wever highlighted that three years ago, during his first term as Minister of Economic Affairs, he worked together with Stichting Monumentenfonds Aruba to achieve this project, and allocated funds from his own budget to invest in the initiative. Part of the building will be occupied by the Department of Economic Affairs, Commerce and Industry, while another part will become a restaurant where Aruban hospitality will continue to shine.

This relocation will help achieve the goal of attracting more visitors and traffic to downtown Oranjestad, creating positive benefits for commercial establishments in the area. Minister Wever also noted that the government has introduced several fiscal incentives that came into effect as of January 2026, such as the investment and revitalization incentive policy for Oranjestad and San Nicolas, the Starters Regulation to stimulate entrepreneurship, the Expat regulation to attract Aruban professionals abroad to return to Aruba, and FreeZone incentives to make Aruba more attractive for various businesses.

Together, these fiscal incentives form an attractive package with benefits that facilitate entrepreneurs and contribute positively to Aruba's economy. Minister Wever emphasized that Cas Veneranda is more than just an example of revitalization and investment in Oranjestad. "It is symbolic. The building used to be a home of an Aruban family where generations were raised and created memories. We decided to bring it back to life—not only restore it, but transform it into a place where history and the future meet."

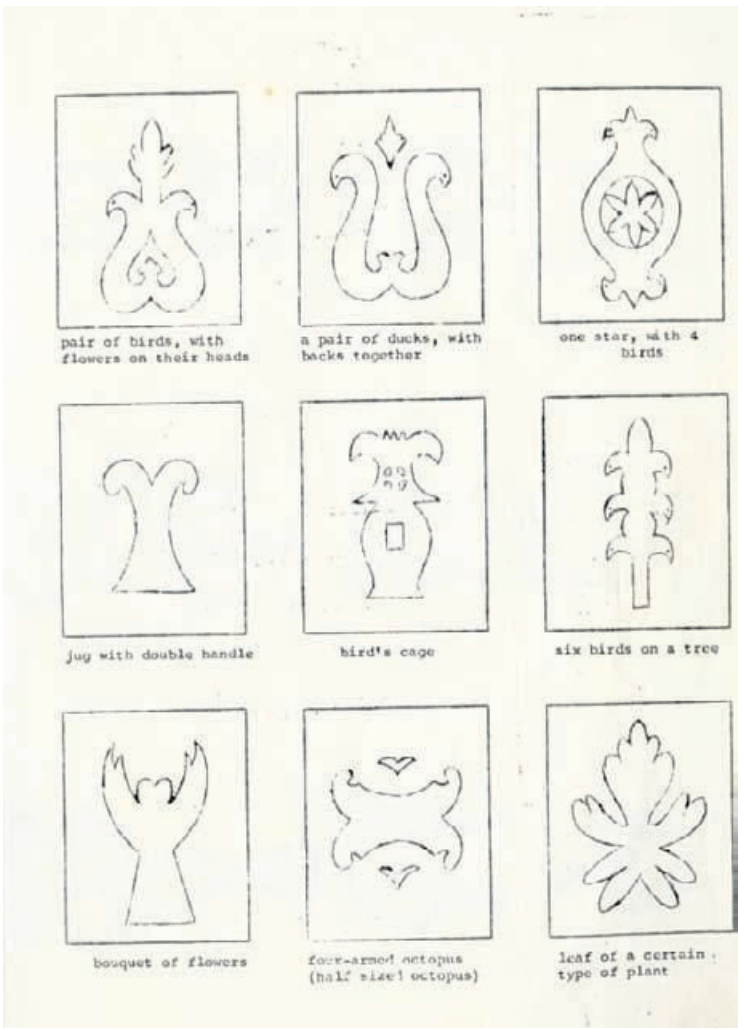
According to the Minister, the journey to restore Cas Veneranda was a long one, starting with a clear vision to revitalize Oranjestad. From dialogue with the Arends family, collaboration with Stichting Monumentenfonds Aruba, to structuring financing with partners such as Nationaal Restauratiefonds

and APFA, each step was taken with care and responsibility. After the agreement, a technical phase followed involving research, design, and preparation for the restoration.

Minister Wever emphasized that the government alone cannot revitalize Oranjestad. Achieving this goal for Aruba requires close collaboration with the private sector, which believes in this vision and, through concrete steps like today, is turning that vision into reality.❑

Cas Floria: The Decorated Houses of Aruba

(Oranjestad)—There may be as many as 200 to 300 houses in Aruba that have beautiful decorations, including curtains, stars, flowers, half-moons, etc., placed on the corners or the upper parts of the house.



These houses can be found everywhere, in nearly every district of Aruba. People always thought that these designs came from an Indigenous culture; possibly, the star design resembled the way it was shown, similar to the "God Sun" of the Indigenous people. However, the history of this decorative system does not go very far back in time.

In his book Millefiori di Aruba, Father Nooyen declares that the first house to receive this type of decoration was the home of Mr. Bernardo Eman Croes in Pos Chikito. Julien (Janchi) Christiaans and Gregorio (Goy) Semeleer built this house in 1920 and created the decorations on the upper corners of the house. Other people in Pos Chikito, who saw this beautiful work, also wanted their houses decorated in the same way.

Leoncio (Joonchi) Henricus of Pos Chikito learned the work from Janchi Christiaans and, together with his son Bonifacio (Bonny) Henricus, continued decorating houses in Pos Chikito and Sabana Basora.

Janchi Christiaans, Goy Semeleer, and others from Noord, such as Hilario Christiaans, Victor Tromp, Gerardo Jacobs, and Cornelis Rosa, brought the same decoration to houses in Noord and Paradera. In 1927, Janchi Christiaans built a house for Julian Tromp in Buguruy.

This was the first house in Noord to receive this type of decoration. Later, those in Paradera, Santa Cruz, and Savaneta copied the house decorations. They practiced these systems up until 1944.

Even today, the patterns are well preserved and protected, but they are no longer used.

Janchi Christiaans began cutting the patterns out of zinc plates and cardboard. He also had his own creations and systems, while Leoncio and Bonifacio Henricus produced their own fantasies. This is what made these decorations popular: many people could turn their imagination into expressive art.

However, the decoration of houses was not originally Janchi Christiaans's idea. Janchi was a disciple of his father, Hose Christiaans, and of the Donati family, from Italian ancestors. They also made these decorations, though without using any patterns, simply designing and applying them with common plaster as the material.

Using Dr. Johan Hartog's Aruba, Breve Historia as reference, I noticed that he also writes that these designs are not indigenous symbols, but only decorative fantasies. One point of disagreement is that he wrote that in 1820 someone from Curaçao began this type of decoration in Aruba.

This means that, according to Father Nooyen, who declared that it began in 1920, it would have actually started 100 years earlier. As part of his research, Ito Tromp also interviewed Mr. Julio Maduro of the Department of Labor at that time, who told him that around 1880 Johannes (Janchi) Wolff began with house decorations. And as Janchi himself said, he learned this from his grandfather, who in earlier times had built the first lighthouse at California Point.

After comparing his information, Ito Tromp wrote that Hartog was right concerning the period when decorated houses began in Aruba in 1820. However, it was not people from Curaçao who started it. Victor Tromp, who was 87 years old at the time of writing, was a member of Janchi Wolff's family.

Julio Maduro said that in 1920 they began again with this type of decoration. In general, there is no specific year (up to now) when Arubans first began with this decorative artistic expression. It is interesting to know that these decorations are a kind of symbol for several generations.

For example: Decorations that appear on the house of the Arends family could also be seen on the houses of the Bermudez or Croes families. This was because parents always gave a specific sign to their sons or daughters when they were getting married.

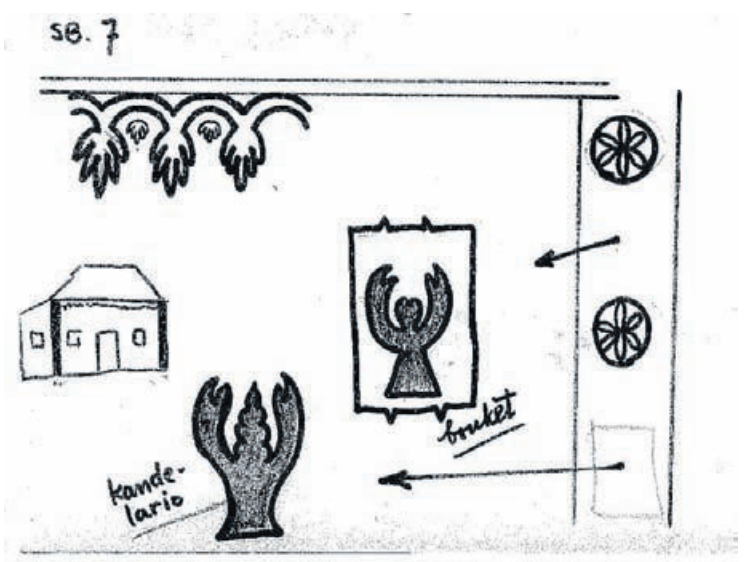
It was also said that these designs had a certain kind of voodoo purpose, to keep away the spirits of the Indigenous people who were buried in the neighborhoods where the houses now stand. However, this has almost completely disappeared.

As for the continuation of these designs from family to family, this is a cultural heritage that is no longer established. For this reason, in earlier times, every young man who married had to have his own house; otherwise, there would be no marriage.

The designs were created according to the individual's imagination. If he saw, for example, six pairs of birds on a tree, he would then paint six pairs of birds on a tree. If he wanted to express his love for his twin children, then he designed a twin.

Nowadays, if you want to use these designs for your house, don't worry—you can simply copy them and paint them.❑

Source: E casnan Decora na Aruba (1976) by Ito Tromp.



Basic driving rules on Aruba: Traffic signs

(Oranjestad)—In Yesterday's issue, we've provided some basic rules when driving on the four-lane highways and roundabouts on the island. Today, we want to offer you more tips and tricks when it comes to driving on the roads and highways of Aruba.

Speed limit in certain areas

As mentioned in yesterday's issue, the legal minimum and maximum speed limit on the island is 50 and 80 km/h respectively. However, there are some areas where it is mandated to drive up to a certain speed. This is always indicated by a circular traffic sign with red border and the number 50 on it. Signs like these are always paired by a similar sign with the number crossed out further down the road. This means that the mandate for this speed is now over; you may increase your velocity. Red borders on traffic sign—whether it's a circle or triangle—usually signal a warning, prohibition or preference.

Besides the "50" sign, you may also encounter a traffic sign that says "bebouwde kom". These can be found in San Nicolas and Oranjestad. Bebouwde kom sings are rectangular and blue, and essentially tell you that you are in a heavily inhabited area. The maximum speed limit in a bebouwde kom is 50 km/h. Just like the previous pair, bebouwde kom signs are also paired with a similar sign crossed out.

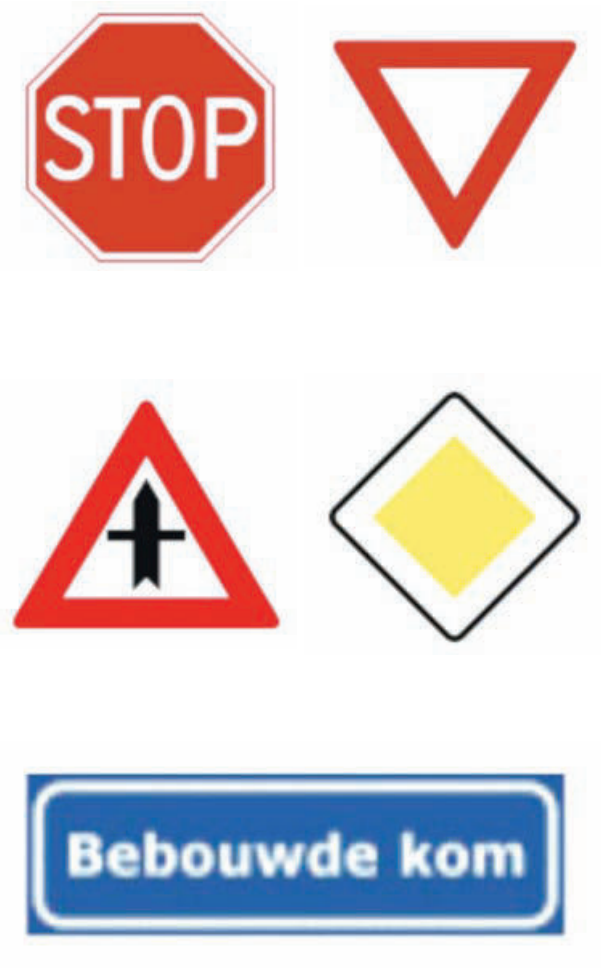
Priority signs

On the main roads of Aruba (not the highways), you may see a yellow, squared sign with a white border. This sign tells you that on this road, you have priority and all other traffic should yield to you. This sign can be seen in Savaneta for example. So, if you are driving on the main road in Savaneta going to San Nicolas, you are driving on a single long road, and other cars that want to get on this main road or cross it, either from an intersection or from a dirt road, must all wait until traffic on the main road is clear. In other words, you do not have to stop for them. This sign too has a counter part that indicates that your priority is over.

Another priority sign you may encounter is a triangle sign with a red border and something that looks like a cross. You'll see this sign in an intersection. The general rule of thumb for crossing an intersection that do not contain traffic lights, roundabouts, sign or arrows on the road, is to always yield for traffic on your right. However, if you encounter this sign on your side of the intersection, you have priority over the other cars, even the one on your right.

However, be careful not to confuse this sign with a similar up-side down triangle, also found on intersections. This sign is a prohibition sign, telling you that you have to stop and give other cars priority. Of course you also have a "stop" sign that mean the same thing. The stop sign is generally used for tricky intersections with minimal view of opposite incoming traffic.

These are some of the basic rules that you would have to know if you decide to drive on the island. These are of course other traffic signs, and we recommend you visit aruba-travelguide.com for an extensive overview of all traffic signs used on Aruba.❑



Picture credits: aruba-travelguide.com

Dining in? Try making some local favorites!

How to make "funchi"

(Oranjestad)—One of the most famous Aruban snacks or appetizers is "funchi hasa" (fried polenta sticks), a super easy meal that adults and children will both enjoy. Here's how to make it!

Before we start, get to know the basics

What is funchi hasa? Funchi, or Aruban polenta, is a popular side dish for local dishes, like soups, stews and fried fish. Made from a corn flour, water and butter mixture, this appetizer is traditionally eaten alongside a warm meal. However, locals also like to fry sticks of funchi for a quick and filling snack.

Ingredients (measured by heart)

1. Polenta flour/Funchi flour
2. Water
3. Butter
4. Salt to taste

Directions

Bring water to a boil in a medium-sized sauce pan. Add in some salt and butter to taste in the boiling water and let this dissolve and melt. Then, gradually add the flour while stirring with a wooden spoon. The mixture will start to begin to harden pretty fast, so be careful not to add too much. At this phase of cooking, you want a goopy thick mixture, but thin enough so you can continue to stir to get all the lumps out.

After reaching a semi-firm, yet flexible texture, grab a baking pan or any large, deep plate, and pour the mixture in. Be sure that this plate is wet or greased so that the mixture does not stick to the bottom. Let this cool completely while it firms up for the last time. Once it's cooled you can enjoy it as is, topped with some butter or shredded cheese. Or, you can take it to another level of deliciousness.

When your funchi is firm enough, cut it into strips (size is up to you). Heat up some oil in a pan and fry those babies up! After frying, you can top it with some cheese or enjoy it with your favorite dipping sauce.❑

Photo credit of fried funchi sticks: Jacqueline Felida on Pinterest.

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

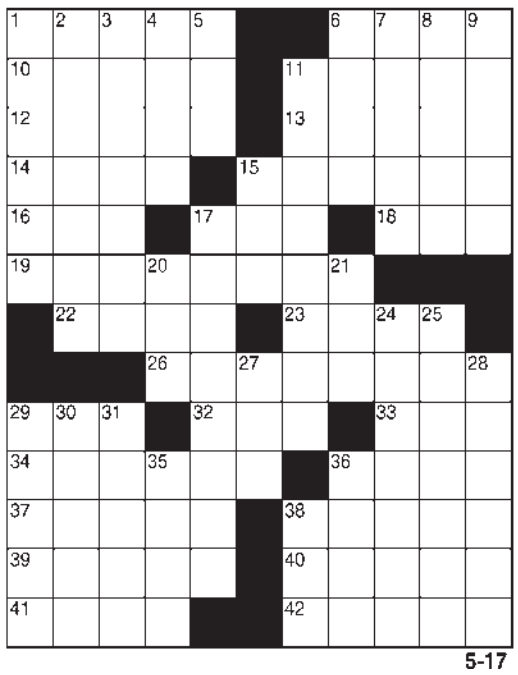
C	A	T	E	R	■	A	D	D	E	R				
H	E	A	V	E	■	P	E	E	V	E				
A	R	M	E	D	F	O	R	C	E	S				
P	I	E	■	E	A	R	■	O	R	E				
S	E	R	V	A	N	T	■	D	E	N				
■	■	■	E	L	S	■	J	E	S	T				
C	O	S	T	S	■	B	U	S	T	S				
O	N	T	O	■	H	E	N	■	■	■				
A	L	A	■	C	A	L	O	R	I	E				
R	E	N	■	A	L	L	■	A	N	A				
S	A	L	E	S	F	O	R	C	E	S				
E	V	E	N	T	■	W	H	E	R	E				
R	E	E	D	S	■	S	O	R	T	S				

ACROSS

1 Lab liquids
6 Ernst's art
10 Twangy
11 Wise ones
12 Creamy color
13 Russian range
14 Parcel (out)
15 Petite
16 Commotion
17 Match part
18 Put away
19 Cosmetics counter buy
22 At hand
23 Melodies
26 Oil-checking item
29 Chemist's place
32 Buck's mate
33 Paint buy
34 Eggy dish
36 Titled woman
37 Alarm sound
38 "— Rae"
39 Snowy wader
40 Totaled
41 Fly high
42 Churlish fellows

DOWN

1 Zoo resident
2 Yielded
3 Uranium-235, for one
4 Be bold
5 Cunning
6 Move quickly
7 Banded rock
8 Perry's assistant
9 Useful skill
11 Travel need
15 Maui souvenir
17 Vociferous
20 Blue
21 Model buy
24 Last name for Lucy
25 Fraud perpetrator
27 Poker prize
28 Massages
29 Places last
30 Barcelona buddy
31 Hall of Fame catcher
35 Lusty look
36 Extinct bird
38 Collar



5-17

A X Y D L B A A X R
is L O N G F E L L O W

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

5-17 **CRYPTOQUOTE**

X LRIRO EYGR GXKZF YM FZR

MDHF FZDF AVGF JRXLK XG

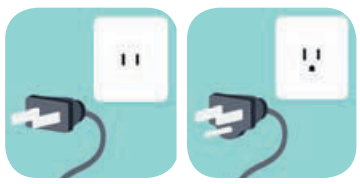
MVL. — CDFZDOXLR ZRSJVOL

Cryptoquote: WHAT A STRANGE THING! TO BE ALIVE BENEATH CHERRY BLOSSOMS. — KOBAYASHI ISSA

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic—but important—information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

Electrical power



Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.

Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku

	4	7			1	5		
			2	6				
						4	6	
	9			8		3	4	
1		8		7		6		
5								
	6				8		9	
			6	5		1		
9	5		1					

Difficulty: ★★★★ 5/2

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Answer to previous puzzle

3	1	2	4	6	7	8	5	9
8	5	4	2	9	1	7	6	3
7	9	6	5	8	3	4	2	1
9	8	1	7	2	5	6	3	4
5	4	7	3	1	6	9	8	2
6	2	3	8	4	9	5	1	7
1	3	9	6	7	8	2	4	5
2	6	5	9	3	4	1	7	8
4	7	8	1	5	2	3	9	6

Difficulty: ★★★★ 5/1

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Tropical forest loss eases after record year: researchers

Paris, France

The pace of tropical forest destruction slowed in 2025 after record losses the year before but remained at worrying levels equivalent to 11 football fields per minute, researchers said Wednesday.

The world lost 4.3 million hectares (10.6 million acres) of tropical primary rainforest last year -- down 36 percent from 2024, said researchers from the World Resources Institute (WRI) and the University of Maryland.

"A drop of this scale in a single year is encouraging -- it shows what decisive government action can achieve," said Elizabeth Goldman, co-director of WRI's Global Forest Watch platform.

"But part of the decline reflects a lull after an extreme fire year," Goldman said.

The researchers also warned that fires fuelled by climate change have become a "dangerous new normal" which threatens to reverse the recent gains made by government efforts to tackle deforestation.

The warming El Nino weather phenomenon is expected to return in the middle of the year, which could push global temperatures even higher, raising the threat of heatwaves, droughts and wildfires.

The researchers, who used satellite data for their report, noted that last year's forest loss was still significant -- about the size of Denmark and 46 percent higher than a decade ago.

Despite last year's progress, global forest loss remains 70 percent above the level required to meet the 2030 goal of halting and reversing forest loss, the researchers said.

"A good year is a good year, but you need good years forever if you're going to conserve, for example, the tropical rainforest," Matthew Hansen, director of the GLAD Lab at the University of Maryland, said in a media briefing.

Aerial view of land for sale after being affected by forest fires in the prime area of Breves, in the Amazon region of the Marajo archipelago, Para State, Brazil, taken on December 9, 2024.

- Government policies -

Much of last year's slowdown was due to sharp declines in Brazil, home to the biggest rainforest in the world.

Brazil's forest loss, excluding fires, was 41 percent lower than in 2024 -- its lowest rate on record.

"Brazil's declines are associated with stronger environmental policies and enforcement since President Lula took office in 2023," Goldman said in a news briefing, referring to Brazilian leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Lula relaunched an anti-deforestation action plan and increased penalties for environmental crimes, she said.

But the country's forests are still threatened by agriculture, which remains the largest driver of forest loss to make room for soy fields and cattle ranches.

Some states in the Amazon have passed legislation to weaken environmental protections, the researchers said.

"Several countries showed that strong policy action can reduce forest loss quickly," Goldman said.

Forest loss in neighbouring Colombia fell 17 percent, the second lowest year on record since 2016, thanks to government policies and agreements limiting forest clearing.

Government policies also helped to limit forest loss in Indonesia, where it increased by 14 percent but was well below the highs seen a decade ago.

In Malaysia, government efforts have helped to stabilise forest loss in the country.

Tropical forest loss remained high in other parts of the world, including in Bolivia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon and Madagascar, the researchers said.

- 'Near-permanent state of emergency' -

Global tree cover loss fell by 14 percent last year.

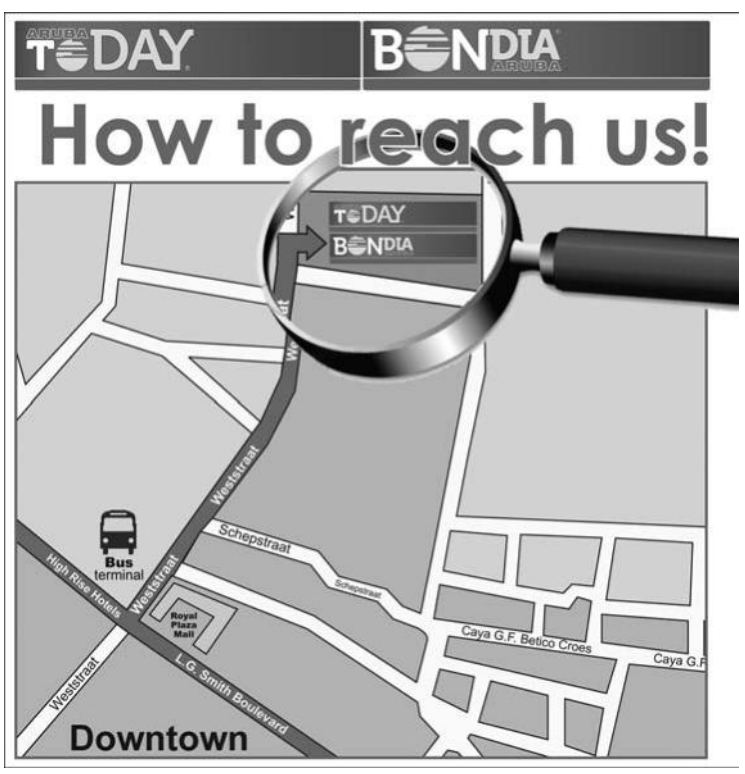
While agricultural expansion is still the leading driver of tree cover loss across the tropics, fires played a major role worldwide, accounting for 42 percent of the destruction.

"For the past three years, fires burned more than twice as much tree cover as they did two decades ago," Goldman said.

While humans cause most fires in the tropics, climate change is intensifying natural fire cycles in northern and temperate regions, the researchers said.

Canada had its second-worst fire year on record last year as wildfires tore through 5.3 million hectares of forest.

"Climate change and land clearing have shortened the fuse on global forest fires," Hansen said. "They are turning seasonal disturbances into a near-permanent state of emergency."❑



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ARUBA TODAY NEWS

How China block of AI deal could stop 'Singapore-washing'

Tokyo, Japan

When is a Chinese AI startup not a Chinese AI startup? When it's based in Singapore, or elsewhere, to distance itself legally and politically from Beijing.

The practice known as "Singapore-washing" is under scrutiny after China blocked a major US acquisition on national security grounds.

China's top economic planning body said Monday it prohibited the deal between Facebook owner Meta and the Chinese-developed, Singapore-based artificial intelligence agent tool Manus.

That came after a report said two Manus co-founders were prevented from leaving China during a review of the deal.

Here, AFP examines what that means:

This photo illustration shows the Manus logo on a mobile phone in Beijing on April 28, 2026.

- What is Singapore-washing? -

Firms move abroad "who seek a combination of funding overseas, a laxer regulatory environment, or to appeal to a global customer base without an explicitly Chinese image", said Wendy Chang at the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS).

"Beijing has heretofore tolerated this practice, but the Manus case marks a major turning point" as the US-China AI race heats up, she told AFP. The move signals "to its own tech leaders, more than to anybody else, that attempts to bypass national regulation will not be tolerated".

Other Chinese tech companies in the Southeast Asian city-state include e-commerce giant Shein, and TikTok -- a subsidiary of ByteDance, which is still based in China.

Manus shifted operations to Singapore last year, but "it's unclear whether it has moved the official registration as well, which may give Beijing more leverage", Chang said.

AFP has approached Singaporean authorities for comment.

- Can the deal be undone? -

Meta and Manus announced the acquisition, reportedly worth around US$2 billion, in December.

Meta said Monday that "the transaction complied fully with applicable law", and "we anticipate an appropriate resolution".

The Wall Street Journal later reported, citing people familiar with the matter, that the US giant was preparing to backtrack on its acquisition after the Chinese edict.

"It may be challenging or even impossible to ultimately reverse this transaction," said Nicholas Cook, a partner at law firm Nixon Peabody CWL.

But for Chinese regulators, "no matter the exact deal structure, sensitive AI technology seen as vital to China's national interests... has found its way into the hands of a major US tech actor".

"How much the Manus deal can actually be unwound is, in my view, a secondary issue," Angela Zhang, a law professor at the University of Southern California, told AFP.

She said China's objective "is to set a precedent and to remind entrepreneurs that they should not transfer critical and sensitive technical know-how overseas without government approval".

- What's at stake? -

China wants to prevent leakage of "talent, tech data, capital", said Dylan Loh at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University.

The country's AI engineers are a key asset, added Chang at MERICS.

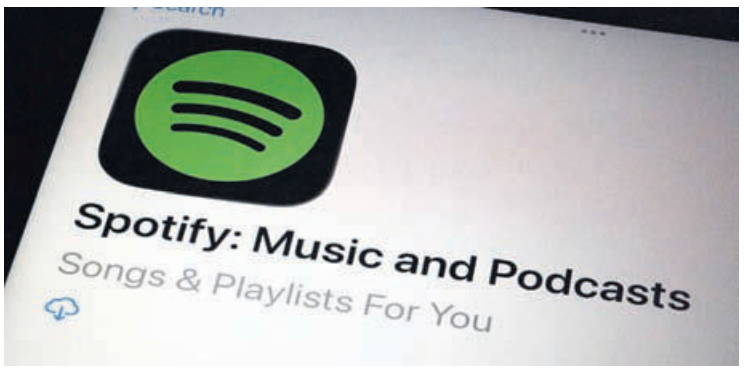
"The Meta deal was an 'acquihire', as much about absorbing the talent behind the startup as its technology," she explained. Other analysts said the matter could be a bargaining chip between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US counterpart Donald Trump at upcoming talks.

The deal may also have woken Beijing up to the possibility that other companies -- including top AI startup DeepSeek -- could also one day set up shop overseas.

- What next for other firms? -

Cook warned that Chinese AI founders "would be well advised to think twice before following in Manus' footsteps". The Financial Times last month said Beijing had restricted two Manus co-founders from leaving China while the review was underway. For Chinese companies using other countries to reach international markets, "this case shows Beijing is not accepting your corporate identity at face value", said Lizzi Lee at the Asia Society Policy Institute.

"So if your tech, founders, or talent base are Chinese, then the company is still strategically Chinese, regardless of where it's incorporated," she told AFP.❑



The Spotify logo in shown on a tablet on February 10, 2026 in Chicago, Illinois.

Spotify rolls out badge to distinguish human artists from AI

Washington, United States

Spotify on Thursday unveiled a new verification system designed to help listeners distinguish human musicians from AI-generated content, as artificial intelligence floods streaming platforms with a growing volume of synthetic tracks.

The Swedish streaming giant said its "Verified by Spotify" badge -- marked by a green checkmark -- will begin appearing on artist profiles and in search results in the coming weeks, signaling that a profile has been reviewed and meets the platform's standards for authenticity.

Profiles that primarily represent AI-generated music or AI-created personas will not be eligible for the badge, the company said in a blog post.

"In the AI era, it's more important than ever to be able to trust the authenticity of the music you listen to," Spotify said.

To earn verification, artists must demonstrate sustained listener engagement over time, comply with Spotify's platform rules and show signs of a genuine presence both on and off the platform, such as concert dates, merchandise and linked social media accounts.

The company said more than 99 percent of artists that listeners actively search for will be verified at launch, representing hundreds of thousands of musicians -- the majority of them independent -- spanning genres and geographies.

The initiative arrives amid mounting concern across the music industry over AI-generated content overwhelming streaming catalogs.

Deezer, a competing platform, disclosed last week that synthetic tracks now make up 44 percent of all new music uploaded to its service each day.

Major labels have also pushed back. Sony Music said recently that it had sought the takedown of more than 135,000 AI-produced songs that mimicked its signed artists across streaming services.

Beyond the badge, Spotify is adding a new information section to all artist pages -- whether or not they hold verified status -- displaying career highlights, release patterns and live performance history. The company compared the feature to nutritional labeling for food, giving listeners a way to quickly gauge an artist's track record on the platform.❑

T-Wolves eliminate Nuggets as Knicks demolish Hawks in NBA playoffs

Los Angeles, United States

The Minnesota Timberwolves eliminated Nikola Jokic's Denver Nuggets while the New York Knicks put on one of the most dominant displays in NBA playoff history, destroying Atlanta to advance Thursday.

Sixth-seeded Minnesota will play the San Antonio Spurs in the Western Conference semi-finals after completing a 110-98 win for a 4-2 series upset defeat of third-seeded Denver.

Three-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic top-scored for Denver with 28 but it was not enough to fend off the dogged Timberwolves, who were playing without star man Anthony Edwards due to injury.

The clash in Minneapolis was tight throughout, with no team gaining a double-digit lead until the game's dying moments.

The Timberwolves edged the first half, leading 57-50 at the break.

Jokic roared to life. The Serbian superstar scored 14 points in the third quarter alone to ensure a nail-biting finish.

Having already been ejected for unsportsmanlike conduct from game four after a shoving match, Jokic enraged the home crowd by sparking another brawl, with Jaylen Clark.

With his Timberwolves leading by five with 90 seconds remaining, Jaden McDaniels sank a long jump-shot for two to rouse the home fans and force a Nuggets timeout.

Jaylen Clark #22 of the Minnesota Timberwolves and Nikola Jokic #15 of the Denver Nuggets exchange blows during the second half in Game Six of the First Round of the NBA Western Conference Playoffs at Target Center on April 30, 2026 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

When play resumed Denver could only turn over the ball again. McDaniels closed out the win with two free throws, ending his night with a career-high 32 points, to top-score overall.

"It's a great night. It's a great victory for us. Hopefully... we've got 12 more to go," said Minnesota coach Chris Finch.

"We came into these playoffs not trying to beat Denver, but trying to win a championship."

A visibly crestfallen Jokic, whose side last won the NBA championship just three years ago, said they "just didn't do a good job."

"I needed to play better. I must play better," he added.

Edwards -- out with a bone bruise and hyper-extended left knee -- could return for the Timberwolves' series with the high-flying Spurs.

- 'Meet the moment' -

The Knicks routed the Atlanta Hawks 140-89.

It was the most points scored and the biggest win by the Knicks in a playoff game, setting up an Eastern Conference semi-final with either the Celtics or the 76ers, who are tied 3-3 after a Philadelphia win.

The Knicks wrapped up their 4-2 series victory in emphatic style, leading the Hawks by as many as 61 points before benching their starters for the final quarter.

New York's 47-point half-time lead, at 83-36, was the widest in NBA post-season history.

OG Anunoby top-scored with 29 points, including 26 in the first half, before he was rested. None of New York's starters played more than 29 minutes.

"We can't just meet the moment, we've got to exceed it, and I thought we did a great job of doing that tonight," said Karl-Anthony Towns, who recorded a triple-double with 12 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists.

Having finished third in the Eastern Conference, the heavily favored Knicks had been down 2-1 early in the playoff series, before roaring back.

They are the first team to advance to the East's semi-finals -- their fourth straight year of reaching that stage.

The Hawks briefly led at the start of the game, going up 11-9 before the wheels dramatically came off. They trailed 40-15 at the end of the first quarter.

The final 51-point margin of defeat was not quite the largest in playoff history, which stands at 58 points.

"Obviously you hate to lose anything. And to lose the way we did, I think, particularly given the enthusiasm and support that we've had from the people in this building... disappointed on a lot of levels," said Hawks coach Quin Snyder.

- Historic rivals -

The Celtics-76ers playoff series is headed for a decisive game seven in Massachusetts after Philadelphia beat Boston 106-93.

The Celtics had held a 3-1 series lead, but the 76ers proved dominant on their home court to make it 3-3.

Tyrese Maxey top-scored with 30 points. Paul George added 23, and 2023 Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid poured in another 19, plus 10 rebounds and eight assists.

It is the 23rd playoff series between the two historic rivals -- an NBA record.❑

Sawe sub-2hr marathon captured 'global imagination' says Coe

Kenya's Sabastian Sawe poses with his new world record time written on his running shoe at the finish of the 2026 London Marathon in central London on April 26, 2026.

Gaborone, Botswana

World Athletics chief Sebastian Coe on Friday hailed Sabastian Sawe's victory in the London Marathon, during which he became the first person to break the mythical two-hour mark in a race, telling AFP it was a feat that captured the imagination of the entire world.

The 31-year-old Kenyan won a stunning race round the streets of London last Sunday in 1hr 59min 30sec, edging a tight battle with Ethiopia's Yomif Kejelcha, who also finished in under two hours.

"There was extraordinary enthusiasm," Coe, a double Olympic gold medallist, told AFP in his first interview since Sawe smashed the record.

"I couldn't switch a television on or listen to the radio or open a newspaper or go online without a lot of coverage. It was a leading story that day."

Sawe's time was more than one minute faster than the previous world record of 2:00:35 set by his compatriot the late Kelvin Kiptum in Chicago in 2023.

He also eclipsed the 1:59:40 posted by another Kenyan Eliud Kipchoge in a 2019 challenge in Vienna when he was aided by a guiding laser light and dozens of pacemakers.

"Breaking the two hour barrier in a competition, not a choreographed one, but in an absolutely full-blooded competition, I think did capture global imagination," said Coe.

The 69-year-old also brushed aside criticism of the new generation of carbon-plated, ultra-light foam shoes which have contributed to the steady descent of the marathon record.

"I think you would have an interesting reflection if you spoke to the coaches and said to them: is your coaching less important than the quality of the shoes the athletes are wearing?" said Coe.❑

Was LIV Golf an expensive failure for Saudis? Not everyone thinks so

South African golfer Charl Schwartzel plays a last shot on the 18th hole during the third and final day of the LIV Golf Invitational Series event at The Centurion Club in St Albans, north of London, on June 11, 2022.

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Throwing more than $5 billion at a divisive new tour and walking away after five seasons does not look like good business, but LIV Golf wasn't all bad news for Saudi Arabia.

Oil-funded LIV, which poached top stars and sent golf's establishment into a tailspin, helped push the conservative kingdom into global view -- one of its key aims, experts say.

They said the exit, confirmed on Thursday after weeks of speculation, does not signal a flight of Saudi money from sport, even after the Middle East war that sparked Iranian attacks around the Gulf.

"Saudi Arabia is not going cold on sport," Simon Chadwick, professor of Afro-Eurasian sport at the Emlyon Business School in Shanghai, told AFP.

"It is evaluating the work that has thus far been done, what remains to be delivered, and what has worked (or hasn't worked). The trajectory remains the same."

The $900 billion Public Investment Fund (PIF) has spent big on sport to raise Saudi's profile, luring superstar footballers such as Cristiano Ronaldo. Saudi Arabia later secured hosting rights for the 2034 World Cup.

The desert monarchy and world's biggest crude exporter, deploying its oil wealth via the PIF, aims to diversify its economic portfolio by encouraging tourism, business and domestic spending, to shield it from an expected slump in demand for fossil fuels.

"Perhaps Saudi plans were rather too grandiose to begin with, but equally the grifters and opportunists of global sport have been seeking to take advantage of the country's sports spending," Chadwick said.

- Blank cheque -

PIF-funded LIV ("54" in Roman numerals), promised to reshape golf when it debuted in 2022 with 54 holes, shotgun starts, dance music on the course and stars such as Dustin Johnson and Phil Mickelson on reported nine-figure deals.

A dispute with the US PGA Tour was headed for the courts until the two rivals announced surprise merger talks which dragged on for years without resolution.

In the meantime, LIV failed to land a major broadcast deal or build a significant fanbase.

Saudi sport investments -- sometimes criticised as "sportswashing", or an attempt to divert attention from human rights -- have grown since LIV was announced in October 2021.

PIF acquired English football club Newcastle United around the same time, the F1 Saudi Grand Prix began two months later and Ronaldo arrived to huge fanfare in January 2023.

"That phase was primarily about visibility and positioning Saudi Arabia as a major global player," Amro Elserty, a France-based Middle East affairs sports analyst, told AFP.

"What has changed is not that this objective disappeared, but that the marginal value of continuing to spend at the same level on a single project like LIV has declined."

The new phase includes cuts beyond LIV. The Saudi Pro League, once a blank cheque for veteran footballers, has pulled back from major signings, and the PIF sold a majority stake in Al Hilal, one of the top Saudi clubs, last month.

PIF "stated from the beginning that financial support for the Saudi league would not be sustainable", said Amir Abdelhalim, an Egyptian football analyst.❑